

**A
HOW TO PREPARE GUIDE
FOR THE**

IT SYSTEMS SPECIALIST, ASSOCIATE – 10527

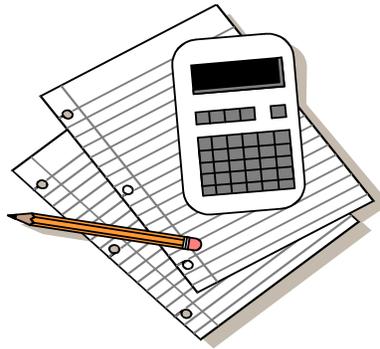
Mainframe/Midrange Option - 399

Networking Option - 400

Database Option - 401

Generalist Option - 402

WRITTEN EXAMINATION



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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these instructions is to help you prepare for the written examination which is being given for the IT Systems Specialist, Associate classification with the State of Alabama. Please note that when you read the word “exam” in the rest of these instructions, it is a short way of referring to the entire written examination. The IT Systems Specialist, Associate written exam is part of the examination process, in which you are participating, used to place individuals on the IT Systems Specialist, Associate register with the State of Alabama. The register is used to hire individuals into IT Systems Specialist, Associate jobs.

Again, the purpose of these instructions and notes is to help you prepare to take the written exam.

It is very important that you sit down in a quiet place and review the material in this booklet. You should also set aside time to practice the things suggested in this booklet in order to prepare for the written exam. Please remember that the material in this booklet is designed to help you prepare for the exam. *You will not be allowed to bring this booklet into the examination session.* Later in this booklet, you will be instructed on what you may bring to the exam session as well as what you must bring to the exam session.

II. JOB PREVIEW

IT Systems Specialist, Associate positions are available in various state agencies and departments located statewide. However, a majority of these positions are located in Montgomery, Alabama.

An IT Systems Specialist, Associate performs technical work in voice and data systems design and maintenance. Employees in this classification analyze, develop, design, modify, implement, and/or maintain local/wide area networks, operating systems, and/or database systems. Work involves specialization in one of these areas or assignment as a generalist performing in multiple areas typically supporting less complex systems. Employees work under general supervision and work is reviewed by a superior for achievement of desired results.

A. Duties

A study of the IT Systems Specialist, Associate classification was conducted prior to developing the examination. A number of employees who work in this position participated in this study. When the information was completed, the results showed that a new employee in the position of IT Systems Specialist, Associate must be able to perform several important duties. A selection of these duties as they relate to each option are listed below:

1. Mainframe/Midrange Option – 399

- Administering automated systems to include user registration, network access control, maintenance of routing tables, security password assignments, and creation of user groups to grant access to authorized users.
- Troubleshooting equipment and software malfunctions to isolate the cause of problems using techniques such as pings and tracers.
- Controlling access to system resources using passwords, login scripts, user groups, and other security software/hardware in order to maintain the security of the data, software, and hardware.
- Monitoring/controlling computer resources such as CPU time, bandwidth, communications speed, and disk space in order to maintain the proper utilization of hardware, software, and data communication systems.
- Coordinating with users and technical staff to discuss data processing needs, identify errors, and recommend solutions.
- Diagnosing user/system hardware and software malfunctions.
- Responding to trouble calls and service requests from end users and/or help desk regarding problems such as inability to access database and data errors in order to correct malfunctions.
- Overseeing and/or performing the maintenance of essential records, reports, and files to provide a permanent record of activities.

2. Networking Option – 400

- Installing new equipment by making physical and logical connections, establishing parameters for the new device, and activating the new piece of equipment to support new user requirements.
- Downloading or ordering and applying program temporary fixes and patches as necessary to fix existing problems.
- Documenting problems to provide a permanent record of problems and fix actions taken.
- Freeing disk space by defragmenting disks and archiving data in order to maximize system resources.

- Monitoring and/or reviewing the connection and servicing of peripheral devices such as printers, scanners, and other peripherals in order to maintain network operations and meet users' needs.
- Establishing and/or modifying computer interface systems using TCP/IP, HDLC, NT, OS2, and other standard protocols in order to allow software and hardware from different systems to communicate with each other.
- Troubleshooting problems with hardware and software modifications to isolate the cause of the malfunction.
- Interacting with help desk personnel in order to document problems, provide assistance, and/or refer problems to other departments.

3. Database Option – 401

- Importing and manipulating data in order to populate tables.
- Analyzing requirements and developing/implementing manual or automated procedures.
- Designing permanent and ad hoc reports and/or queries using JCL, SQL, or other scripting language or software tools.
- Testing reports/queries/programs to make sure they produce the desired results using test data.
- Designing the presentation of the data to the user to include forms, reports, and/or data entry screens.
- Providing technical support/training (individual and classroom) for local and remote users to include both hardware and software.
- Coordinating with users and technical staff to identify and correct errors.
- Handling sensitive data in a secure manner in order to uphold individuals' confidentiality rights.

4. Generalist Option – 402

- Acting as lead technician in the installation, service, and performance analysis of network equipment.
- Loading database and/or data communications software to ensure a working interface and effective performance between applications software, systems software, and installed hardware.

- Installing hardware to include adding storage space, tape subsystems, and memory in order to upgrade existing systems.
- Testing patches and upgrades in order to ensure compatibility with existing operating systems and applications.
- Scheduling implementation of new hardware or software in a manner that minimizes adverse effects on current production.
- Setting up passwords and groups in order to configure/control access to the data.
- Demonstrating the proper use and maintenance of end-user hardware.
- Training technicians on the equipment already installed within the agency/department.

B. Knowledges

The study also showed that the following knowledges are associated with the above duties for all four options. These knowledges are needed on the first day of work (before training):

- Knowledge of operating systems such as (but not limited to) Attachmate and IBM P-COM to include capabilities and limitations as needed to perform communications functions including emulation.
- Knowledge of networking principles as needed to troubleshoot problems, design systems, and ensure connectivity.
- **Knowledge of basic math such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division as needed to solve problems.**
- Knowledge of backup and recovery procedures as needed to restore information.
- **Knowledge of the English language to include grammar, spelling, punctuation, and composition as needed to create manuals and documentation and interact with users and management.**
- Knowledge of basic PC functions such as word processing, database administration, and the use of spreadsheets as needed to generate service requests and prepare reports and memos.

C. Abilities

The study also showed that the following abilities are associated with the preceding duties for all four options. These abilities are needed on the first day of work (before training):

- **Ability to follow instructions to include both written and oral as needed to design and maintain systems.**
- Ability to conduct research using methods such as questioning users, querying on-line resources, and utilizing technical manuals/publications as needed to design, upgrade, and maintain systems.
- Ability to troubleshoot problems by identifying and applying processes and procedures as needed to isolate and resolve the root cause of the malfunction.
- **Ability to think logically as needed to troubleshoot and resolve unique problems.**
- **Ability to read and comprehend technical specifications and manuals as well as service contracts as needed to install hardware, develop and configure software, establish networks, administer services, and gain technological expertise related to the utilization of information technology.**
- Ability to communicate orally in an effective manner as needed to train users and data processing staff; disseminate information to operations staff, programming staff, users, and vendors; gather information; and assign programming tasks.
- Ability to communicate in writing as needed to train functional and technical users; disseminate information to operations staff, programming staff, users, and vendors; gather information; and assign information technology related tasks.
- Ability to make decisions to include identifying minimum levels of performance needed and maximum resources available as needed to identify the most cost-effective solution to a user's problems or needs.
- Ability to develop a working relationship with users and vendors to include tactful verbal and written exchanges of information and listening and responding to their needs as needed to promote a good working relationship with users and vendors.
- **Ability to plan and organize multiple assignments such as prioritizing and working on several user requests, work orders, or vendor requests as needed to complete assignments in a timely manner and satisfy users' needs.**
- Ability to learn new tasks and new technology including reading technical journals, industry papers, and information on the Internet as needed to better serve customer needs and remain current on new technology.

- Ability to work under minimal supervision in order to accomplish daily tasks and prioritize work assignments without constant direction and instruction.

The examination for IT Systems Specialist, Associate will measure the knowledges and abilities above that appear in **bold print**. The remaining knowledges and abilities must be demonstrated during the probationary period if you are hired into an IT Systems Specialist, Associate position.

III. PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION

A. What to do Before the Examination

Here are some suggestions for what to do before the exam and for getting to the testing location on time and with the proper things that you will need to take the test.

- Read and study this booklet. You should practice the things suggested in this booklet.
- Be well rested. Get a good night's sleep for several nights in a row before the written exam.
- Dress comfortably. The total time provided for completion of the exam will be three hours.
- Allow plenty of time to get to the exam site. If you are rushed and late, you may be upset when you get there. Plan to arrive at least 20 minutes before the exam start time.

B. What to do During the Examination

Some people are nervous when they take tests. There is nothing wrong with that. Whenever you are going to do something important, it is good to feel a bit keyed-up. This is nature's way of getting you warmed up and ready, similar to an actress or actor about to go on stage for a performance. However, it is not good to be so nervous that all you can think about is how nervous you are. You need to keep your mind on the test questions, and not on your feelings. To improve your ability to do this, you will find ideas in this booklet on how to study and prepare for the written exam. **The more prepared you are, the more comfortable and less nervous you will feel during the exam.**

- Don't give up. In an exam like this one, some questions will seem easy and some will seem hard. Most likely, no one will answer every question correctly. If it is hard for you to figure out an answer, it is probably hard for other people too. Keep your mind on the test, and try to answer every question. Mark an answer on your answer sheet even if it is a guess. You will not be penalized for guessing.
- Use your time efficiently. You will have three hours to complete the exam. The exam is not a test of how quickly you can answer questions. However, it does not allow you

all the time you might like to have. In the parts of the test that require reading, try to keep a steady pace. Try to finish as much of the test as you can.

- Follow the instructions of the examination monitor *at all times*. A monitor will be at the test site when you report. The monitor will check your picture identification and Exam Notification Letter/Postcard, and then provide you with test materials.
- Use the restroom before the examination, if possible. The examination monitor will provide you with instruction concerning restroom availability during the test administration. It is important to remember that the time that you take to use the restroom is time away from working on the examination.
- Do not open any examination booklets or instructions or begin working on the exam until you are instructed by the monitor to do so.
- Do not cheat. Candidates making any disturbances or caught cheating will be disqualified from the exam.
- Ask questions concerning exam administration issues only. Test monitors **will not** be able to interpret exam questions for you.
- Check to make sure that your answers to questions are marked in the location on the answer sheet that matches the number of the question you are answering.
- Review your responses to the more difficult questions if you have time remaining after you have completed the test. Once you have finished, notify the monitor for instructions.

In summary, there are two things you can do that will make you feel more comfortable taking the exam: 1) follow the guidelines presented in this booklet on how to prepare for the exam and 2) become familiar with the kinds of questions that will be used in the exam.

IV. TAKING THE EXAMINATION

A. What to Bring to the Examination

- Bring the Exam Notification Letter or Notification Postcard issued to you by mail by the State of Alabama Personnel Department to the exam site. **You will not be allowed to enter the examination site or take the exam without the Exam Notification Letter/Postcard.**
- Bring one form of picture identification to the exam location. This may be a valid driver's license, a military identification card, a student identification card, or some other form of picture identification. You only need one form of picture identification. **You will not be allowed to enter the examination site or take the exam without one form of picture identification.**

- Remember to bring several number 2 pencils with erasers to the exam. It is also recommended that you bring a highlighter.
- You may bring a calculator to use for the examination. Small solar powered or battery operated calculators that perform basic functions such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, square roots, or percentages are allowed. Calculators that plug-in, utilize tape, have word processing, spelling, thesauruses, or other storage and retrieval capabilities (except basic memory functions) are not allowed. **Calculators that are a feature on a cell phone are not permitted.** Calculators are subject to inspection by exam monitors. Applicants may not borrow or share calculators at the exam site.

B. What Not to Bring to the Examination

- Do **NOT** bring this booklet to the exam location. You will not be permitted to bring it in the testing room.
- Do **NOT** bring any of your study materials to the exam. This includes notes, manuals, and other study materials.
- Do **NOT** bring cell phones to the testing site. Pagers should only be brought if it is absolutely necessary. All pagers must be set to vibration mode.

C. Examination Description

You will be given three hours to complete the exam. Use your time efficiently. The exam is not a test of how quickly you can answer questions. However, it does not allow you the time you might like to have. In the parts of the test that require reading, try to keep a steady pace. Try to finish as much of the test as you can.

While reading passages, you may want to take a few notes. Make your notes brief. You may also want to underline or highlight important information as you read. Additional note-taking tips are found in the following section, “Effective Note Taking.”

Again, don’t give up. Many people give up too easily on tests. If the question or problem seems hard, they don’t even try. Mark an answer on your answer sheet even if it is a guess. You will not be penalized for guessing. On the other hand, do not spend much time on any one question just because it is hard. This may not leave you enough time to answer the questions that you know.

D. Effective Note Taking

While reading passages, you may want to take a few notes. You may also want to underline or highlight important information as you read. Why take notes? There are several good reasons to take notes:

- Taking notes can help you remember; notes you take in your own words are easier to understand and remember.
- Writing down notes may actually make ideas you did not fully understand clearer.

The following are some rules and suggestions for taking effective notes:

- Make your notes brief. Pick out only the important points.
- Do not use a sentence when you can use a phrase. Likewise, do not use a phrase when you can use a word.
- Use abbreviations whenever possible.
- Put most notes in your own words. However copy definitions, specific facts, and specific rules and procedures exactly as they are presented.

E. Strategies for Taking the Examination

By following the suggestions listed below, you can do your best:

- Read the questions carefully. Be sure you know what the questions ask and what the choices say before you try to answer the question. It is easy to choose wrong answers simply by failing to pay attention to part of the question or failing to read all of the answers.
- Choose the answer that is generally best. To keep questions short, they can not have a lot of detail. You should give the answer that would generally be considered the best.
- Make a decision about each question. For example:
 1. You may decide you know the answer. Mark your answer on the answer sheet and spend no more time on that particular question.
 2. You may decide you are fairly sure of the answer, but want to think about it. Mark the answer you think is correct on the answer sheet and make a note of it in the test booklet so it will be easier to find later.
 3. You may decide one or two answers are definitely not the best. Eliminate the answers you know are wrong then direct your attention to those choices that are potentially correct.
 4. You may decide that figuring out the answer is possible, but will take you a lot of time. Don't mark any answer. Note the question in your test booklet so you can find it when you are ready to come back to it. Make sure that you finish the test in enough time to come back to answer the question.

5. You may decide you don't know the answer and that all you can do is make a guess. Make a guess and mark the answer sheet to show your answer. Don't spend any more time on that question. There is no penalty for guessing and sometimes you may guess right.
- Don't change answers unless you have a good reason. When people change their answers, they more often change from a right answer to a wrong answer than from a wrong answer to a right answer. The reason seems to be that they start thinking about some specific case, which results in choosing an answer on the basis of facts that are not given in the question. In other instances, people think about what some part of a question says and forget what the rest of the question said.
 - Use your time efficiently. You may not have all the time you might like to complete the test. In the parts of the test that require reading, read at a normal pace so that you can finish the test and have time to go back and work on the questions you saved until last.
 - Don't give up. Many people give up too easily on test questions. If the question looks too hard, they don't even try. Look for the specific information needed to answer the question. However, do not spend too much time on any one question just because it is hard. Doing that may not leave you enough time to answer the questions that you know.

F. Study Suggestions

You may find some of the following ideas helpful in preparing for the exam:

- Do not prepare for the exam in a single session.
- Study in a quiet place. Do not study when you are doing something else.
- Make up your own tests and take them.
- Pretend that you are in a real testing situation and try not to talk to anyone else while you are taking the sample tests.
- Practice following instructions. Read sections of how-to books or instructions manuals and practice taking notes or highlighting important aspects of the sections.
- Study the Sample Test Items in this booklet.
- Study whatever material you believe will assist you in learning each of the duties, along with the knowledges and abilities required for the IT Systems Specialist, Associate position as listed in Section II of this booklet.

V. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A. Contact Information

As you prepare to actually take the test and find you have questions regarding exam administration not answered in this section, please contact **Kim Ludder** at **242-3389**. It is important to note that exam administrators are not allowed to divulge specific information about the content of the exam.

B. General Questions

1. How do I request reasonable accommodations?

If you would like to request special testing accommodations or have any questions concerning the test site or testing conditions, please contact the State Personnel Department at (334) 242-3389.

2. What do I do if I have a scheduling conflict?

If there is a conflict in your schedule, and you are unable to attend the written exam at the time and date for which you have been scheduled, you must resubmit your Application for Examination. The State Personnel Department will schedule you for the next available administration of this written test.

3. When will I get my score?

Four to six weeks after completing the exam, you will receive a Notice of Examination Results postcard in the mail. This postcard will identify your score or Band placement for the written exam. If you have not received your score within four to six weeks, you should call the State Personnel Department.

In addition to your Band placement, you may also obtain your standing, or rank on the register, online at www.personnel.alabama.gov. From the home page, you should click on “Applicants” and then “Register Standings”, and follow the instructions. For security purposes, you must now create an online profile in order to access your standing.

C. Banded Scoring

When the written exam for IT Systems Specialist, Associate is graded, the scores will be grouped into bands. When you receive notification of how you did on the exam, you will not be given a numerical score (e.g., You will not receive a score of 95 out of 100). Rather, you will be informed of the band into which your score fell. The following is provided to help you better understand the banding procedure.

1. What is Banded Scoring?

Banded scoring or banding is one way to reduce the impact of fluctuation in test scores that do not provide meaningful information about differences in the ability to do the job. One important purpose of testing is to identify the differences in test scores that reflect real differences among candidates. Banding is a statistical procedure for grouping raw test scores that statistically are not meaningfully different from one another. In banded scoring, bands are set objectively and mathematically. They are not manipulated arbitrarily.

2. Misconceptions about Banded Scoring

There are many misconceptions about banding and the use of banded scores. Some of the most common misconceptions are listed below. Each misconception is followed by a clarification.

- a. Misconception: Each band should have the same number of people. The people in a band are similar to each other in that statistically there is no meaningful difference in their scores. Sometimes Band 1 may be very large and at other times it may be small. We do not force bands to be a certain size. The size of the bands are based on the scores people make.
- b. Misconception: Band numbers have no meaning. I don't have a score.

Think of a band as a group of tied scores. Think of a band as a group of scores that statistically are not meaningfully different. In school, two students with average grades of 94.5 and 94.3 would both be grouped into a band called "A" because the teacher cannot be sure that .2 of a point is a real difference in achievement. Think of scores on achievement tests children take in school. The fine print on the tests always cautions you not to focus on the numerical score but rather on the comparative score which uses some grouping technique such as percentiles, stanines, standard deviations, grade levels, etc. These grouping techniques are considered forms of banding.

- c. Misconception: Band numbers are the same as letter grades.

Band 1 does not equate to an "A," Band 2 to a "B," etc. In school a predetermined numerical score (e.g., 92-100) equals an A. In banding, scores are banded only in relation to one another. Unlike grade school bands, the width of bands are not set in advance. You compete against your peers only. Your scores are set in relation to your peers only.

- d. Misconception: A band score on one test has the same value as a band score on another test.

Banded scores are test specific and cannot be compared to banded scores on other tests.

- e. Misconception: People who have been on the job the longest should be in the top bands.

Time spent in a job may not be the same as skill in doing the job. The people with the strongest skills (or who did best on the exam) should be in the top bands. Some of these people will have been in the job longer than others. Years of service do not always equal proficiency.

- f. Misconception: A standing in Band 4 or below automatically indicates failure or ineligibility for jobs.

This statement is false. A band score of 4 or lower is not automatically equated with failure. The true test of your employment opportunities is whether or not you can be certified and considered for a job vacancy.

- g. Misconception: Banding replaced the “Rule of 10.”

Banding did not replace the “Rule of 10.” The “Rule of 10” determines the number of bands to be certified. In the past, tied scores referred to an actual numerical score (e.g., two candidates with a score of 98.98 were considered tied) while now all of the scores within a band are considered tied.

- h. Misconception: People in a band do not differ.

When several people are placed in the same band, it does not mean that those people do not differ. Instead, it means that their scores on the exam do not differ enough to be separate scores.

VI. EXAMINATION STRUCTURE

There are several different types of items on the exam. The exam items will require you to answer questions related to thinking logically and following written instructions. Your knowledge of English to include grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc. will also be measured. Exam items also include reading comprehension-type questions in which you will read a passage of information and answer questions based on that information. All of the instructions will be presented to you before the questions.

You will find examples of exam items in the next section of this booklet. Please review these items in order to familiarize yourself with the kinds of items you will be asked and the format of the exam.

VII. SAMPLE TEST QUESTIONS

Examples: Knowledge of basic math

The IT Division's budget for the current year is \$300,000. The Division has already spent 10% of the budget on equipment, 66% on salaries, 8% on training and 3½% on supplies. How much money does the Division have left in its budget for the remainder of the year?

- A. 27,000
- B. 27,500
- C. 37,000
- D. 37,500

The correct answer is D.

$1,242 + 976 + 14 =$ _____.

- A. 2,232
- B. 2,242
- C. 2,248
- D. 2,358

The correct answer is A.

Examples: Knowledge of English grammar, spelling, punctuation, and composition

Ted hopes that the new software shall last at least until next year.

- A. No change
- B. Replace shall with will.
- C. Replace shall with may.
- D. Replace shall with should.

The correct answer is B.

Select the response which indicates the clearest and most concise use of standard English.

- A. The new software might could expand our capabilities.
- B. The new software will should expand our capabilities.
- C. The now software possibly expand our capabilities.
- D. The new software could expand our capabilities.

The correct answer is D.

Examples: Ability to follow instructions

All users will be assigned a 6-digit number to identify them. The first digit identifies the location of the user. The second digit represents the code number used to identify the IT employee working with the user. The third set of numbers (four digits) represents the last four numbers of the user's phone number.

Location:

1 Mobile
3 Troy
4 Greenville

IT Contact:

6 Nancy White
7 Tom Jackson
9 Maria Anderson

If the user's identification number is 4-9-3324, who is the IT employee working with the user?

- A. Nancy White
- B. Tom Jackson
- C. Maria Anderson
- D. None of the above

The correct answer is C.

Which of the following could be a user number of Wendy Young, who is working in Troy and whose IT contact is Maria Anderson?

- A. 1-9-3398
- B. 3-9-7222
- C. 4-7-1604
- D. 4-9-5807

The correct answer is B.

Examples: Ability to think logically

The chart below is a multi-record screen display for part of a large database.

Composition	Date	Composer	Nation
Andante in C	1760	Mozart	Austria
Fidelio	1805	Beethoven	Germany
Appalachian Spring	1944	Copeland	USA

By what field are these entries sorted?

- A. Composition
- B. Date
- C. Composer
- D. None of the above

The correct answer is B.

If the first field for "Date" is 1805, by what field would the entries be sorted in ascending order?

- A. Composition
- B. Date
- C. Nation
- D. None of the above

The correct answer is D.

Examples: Ability to read and comprehend

Sources warn that our acceptance of technological innovations has unanticipated implications for our privacy. And while people may accept this as a given, they may not recognize how far it goes. In our increasingly computerized world, movement and activities can be tracked by our using credit cards, toll roads, even subway and library cards. Companies who pay for the information collected using these methods can aggregate the information for their own uses.

According to the passage, technological innovations

- A. have exceeded our willingness to understand their implications.
- B. are paid for by companies who want to use their information.
- C. are accepted as a given.
- D. have resulted in the collection of information about our behavior.

The correct answer is D.

According to the passage, which of the following are used to collect data?

- A. Library cards
- B. Toll roads
- C. Both A and B
- D. Neither A nor B

The correct answer is C.

Example: Ability to plan and organize

Mary can work on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Tom can work on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Al can work on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

You need at least two employees to work on Wednesdays. Which of the following would be available to work?

- A. Mary and Tom
- B. Mary and Al
- C. Tom and Al
- D. All three of the employees

The correct answer is B.